

# ISLAM & THE WEST

دریں اپنے قریب میں وہیں کیا  
جسے ایک دوسرے میں نہیں  
دوں مشرق اور دوں مغرب کا ایک  
تم اپنے رہت کی کون کون سی نعمتوں کو مجھ پر لائے گے

KAUSAR NIAZI

# **ISLAM AND THE WEST**

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First Edition, June 1976

Copies printed, 5000

Price Rs. 5.00

PRINTED AT ASHRAF PRESS, LAHORE, AND  
PUBLISHED BY SH. MUHAMMAD ASHRAF,  
KASHMIRI BAZAR, LAHORE (PAKISTAN)

## Preface

THE paper *Islam and the West* is a Presidential Address delivered at one of the sessions in the Colloquium in the World of Islam Festival, 1976.

The Festival held in London was a bold step forward in introducing Islam to the West. Although attempts had been made in the past in this connection, yet as a largescale endeavour it was unprecedented. It was indeed for the first time that Islam as a faith and civilisation was presented in the West as a living phenomenon and not merely as an *object d'art* to

be nicely put aside in museums and art galleries. No more was Islam to be presented as a legacy of the past. No longer was Islam a subject of study by a limited number of esoteric scholars. It was thus definitely a welcome breakthrough on the part of the West in understanding Islam.

What impact this Festival would make in promoting understanding of Islam in the West only future can tell. The results of such attempts are often conditioned and also limited by the causes that motivate such attempts. Unfortunately, the endeavour to study and understand Islam in the past was largely motivated by colonial, polemical and other such interests. Obviously studies which aim to serve such interests cannot help promote better understanding.

The present growth of interest in Islam in the West may also be attributed to such motives. One may probably find in them an urge to know more about the faith and culture of the oil-producing countries whose

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strength has suddenly made itself felt even by a man in the street in the West. To negotiate with them the West has to know their mental outlook, social behaviour and moral values. Or perhaps one may term it as an attempt on the part of the West to win favour of the Muslim world for their cause. One may probably find still other reasons.

Nevertheless, whatever the motive or angle of the observer, the truth cannot fail to impress upon the viewer. Many Western observers of Islam have gone through this experience. Not only that they became aware of their prejudices, but they also realised that the picture of Islam in the West was distorted and needed correction. We look at the World of Islam Festival from this view and therefore welcome it.

The programme of the Festival, in addition to a number of exhibitions, lectures and conferences, included a Colloquium in which scholars from all over the world par-

ticipated. The subjects discussed in the Colloquium were both varied and topical and hence its significance in the Festival was obvious.

I was given the honour to preside over one of the sessions of the Colloquium. At this occasion I delivered the Presidential Address which constitutes this booklet. It was gratifying to see that this Address aroused the interest of the people in the subject of the Address. Discussions ensued even after the session was over. One evidence of the wide appreciation of this Address was that British Broadcasting Corporation arranged a series of short talks and discussions about this Address on their networks. These discussions which were broadcast on Radio and T.V. were participated by eminent scholars. Comments on this paper also appeared in London newspapers.

I am quite satisfied with the reception of this paper among the participants of the

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Festival. In order to make it available to a large number of readers it is now being published along with notes and references.

I hope that the study of this paper will help promote understanding between East and West and will be instrumental in bringing them closer to each other.

KAUSAR NIAZI

# TABLE OF TRANSLITERATION

In order to reproduce faithfully and accurately the exact pronunciation of Arabic terms in English letters, the following transliteration scheme has been followed in this booklet:

## *Consonants*

ا	'	j	z	ڦ	q
ب	b	س	s	ڪ	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ڻ	l
ث	th	ص	s	ڻ	m
ج	j	ض	d̪	ڻ	n
ح	h	ط	t̪	ڻ	h
خ	kh	ڦ	z̪	ڻ	w
د	d	ڻ	ڻ	ڻ	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh		
ر	r	ڻ	f		

## *Vowels*

Short    ا = a;    ا = i;    ا = u

Long    آ = ā;    ئ = ِئ;    ُ = ُو

*Diphthongs*: ِئ = ay; ُو = aw

*Double*: ِئ = iyya; ُو = uwwa

*Tā' marbūtah*: ة = ah; in construct: ة, at

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# Islam and the West

I AM grateful to the organisers of the Colloquium for this opportunity to address such a distinguished gathering of scholars of Islam from all over the world. It has been a matter of great pleasure and honour for me to be associated with this prestigious aspect of the World of Islam Festival.

Availing myself of this opportunity I thought I should give briefly my views about how the West has, by and large, looked at Islam, and how the misconceptions and misunderstandings generated by this attitude may be corrected.

Let me say first of all that the organisers of the Festival deserve congratulations for having selected London as the venue of the

Festival, for London has been for a long time the nerve centre of the Western world and, of all the Western peoples, the British have had more contacts with Muslims and the culture of Islam than any other Western nation. The Festival should be of great help in introducing Islam to this part of the world and acquainting the people of the West with the true teachings of Islam. It should also provide an appropriate occasion for bringing before the Western peoples the true image of the great culture of Islam and enlisting the sympathies of the West for the present conditions of the Muslim nations.

Despite deep contacts by the British in particular and almost all Western nations in general, great ignorance about Islam and its culture still prevails among the Western peoples and many prejudices against Muslims exist which make it difficult to bring the two on a common platform. It is to be hoped that by removing this ignorance and

dispelling these prejudices, the Festival will contribute to a better understanding between the West and the nations of Islam and will bring them closer in the field of international cooperation. But, for the attainment of this object it will be necessary to present before the Western world the real teachings of Islam in their pristine purity.

Unfortunately, the true image of Islam and of the Prophet of Islam has been sedulously distorted by the Orientalists who are never tired of creating misunderstanding about Islam and its Prophet in the minds of the Western peoples. Their prejudiced eye seizes upon anything in Islam which they can turn to their advantage and which may be of use to them in creating false impressions about our religion. For example, D.S. Margoliouth says about the Prophet of Islam :

“His policy appears to have been to bind his followers to himself and then to each other by every

possible lie.”<sup>1</sup>

Here a person is being called a liar who, in the unanimous judgment of his contemporaries, was the most truthful person of his age, was called *Sādiq* (truthful) and *Amin* (trustworthy) by his fellow citizens even before he claimed to be a Prophet. Also it is forgotten that his followers could easily detect him if he ever told a lie, because they were shrewd men.

Similarly, the author of *Islam and the West*, Norman Daniel, quotes a certain San Pedro who says:

“When Mohammad reached the age of forty, he discontinued the adoration of idols and said that he was a Prophet.”<sup>2</sup>

1. D.S. Margoliouth, “Muhammad,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, XV, 647.

2. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, p. 29. This work by Daniel is replete with examples of such prejudices. In fact, the reason why Daniel wrote this book was also to analyse these prejudices. In the Foreword to this book he defines the purpose of this book as “to bring out particular aspects of post-medieval developments which may help Europeans and Muslims alike to identify prejudices which still, after so many centuries, affect European attitudes. . .” (p. v)

This is a completely false charge for which no proof has been furnished. It is well established by all available records of history that Muhammad (peace be on him) never worshipped an idol in his entire life.

The same Norman Daniel writes:

"San Pedro was astonished that the earth did not devour Mohammad for simulating these fits to obtain other men's wives."<sup>3</sup>

This is a novel, atrocious and malicious charge. The Holy Prophet never married another man's wife except that of Zayd whom he had adopted as a son. But here the reasons for this step were sufficiently strong. Zaynab was unwilling to marry Zayd in the first place, and did so only after the Holy Prophet prevailed upon her to agree. After the marriage, their relations remained strained, as a result of which Zayd divorced her. Secondly, the Prophet wanted to put an end to the custom of the Arabs who regarded an adopted son as one

3. Ibid., p. 31.

equal to a real son in all respects. By this act the Prophet removed the deeply rooted idea of the Arabs that the adopted son enjoys the same privileges and rights as the real son.

Margoliouth in his book, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, referring to such expressions in the Qur'ān as "until a camel passes through the eye of a needle," jumps to the conclusion that the Prophet had made a deep study of the New Testament and was influenced by certain Biblical passages.<sup>4</sup> He ignores the fact that both the Qur'ān and the New Testament came from a common source, that is, both were Divine revelations. Therefore, the occurrence of a few common phrases cannot establish the conclusion at which Margoliouth arrives.

Montgomery Watt in his book *Muhammad : Prophet and Statesman* tries to create the impression that Islamic morality was a

4. D.S. Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 61.

revival of pre-Islamic tribal morality. He says that the stress laid in the Qur'ān on looking after the interests of the orphans and the needy is an echo of tribal morality in which the head of the tribe was under an obligation to look after the orphans and the needy.<sup>5</sup> This criticism is not justified by existing conditions. Islam was a forward movement and not a revival of the past. Islamic morality is something completely different from tribal morality. Why does Montgomery Watt ignore the fact that forgiveness of man's faults has also been stressed by the Qur'ān, while in pre-Islamic Arabia forgiveness was considered a weakness and vengeance was regarded as the normal duty of a tribesman?

Much is made by the Orientalists about the marriages of the Holy Prophet. Unfortunately, with all their learning, they fail to appreciate the fact that you cannot apply

5. Cf. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p.p. 49 ff.

latter-day European social standards to the primitive society into which the Prophet was born and which had its own norms of domestic and ethical behaviour. They also completely forget the Prophets of the Old Testament, including Solomon, who were said to have hundreds of wives. And in that twisted outlook they also forget, or purposely ignore, the fact that in his youth, when passion for women is a normal occurrence in all men, the Holy Prophet remained content with one wife. Ultimately when he did contract other marriages he was almost fifty years old, and it is the height of churlish malice to attribute to him, at that age, a tendency towards indulgence in sex, particularly when his private life was known by all to be singularly pious and absolutely free of any immoral taint.

The truth is that, in all his later marriages, the Prophet was moved only by social and humanitarian considerations and by his desire to forge new bonds of association

with different sections of his people. But this truth becomes recognisable only if there is a genuine desire to understand the man and his mind.

Similarly, the Orientalists criticise the Holy Prophet for his wars against the enemies of Islam. In this they are unconsciously influenced by the non-violent nature of the struggle conducted by Jesus Christ, forgetting the fact that Jesus Christ was faced by a wholly different situation. The whole might of the Roman Empire would have been arrayed against him if he had taken up arms, and the Roman army would have completely exterminated him. Secondly, Jesus Christ's mission was limited to the moral reformation of the Jews. He had no need to come into conflict with the Romans for whom he had no message. The Prophet of Islam was forced to take up arms because his opponents would not allow him to preach his religion peacefully. He was never the aggressor. His wars sometimes look

aggressive because he forestalled the enemy and would not allow him to take him unawares. And in, at least, two cases, the important battles of Badr and Uhud, he had to face attacks by his opponents of Mecca and fight purely in self-defence. His own love of peace is shown by the treaty of Hudaybiyah which he made with the unbelievers against the will of some of his eminent Companions.

Another misunderstanding about Islam created by the Orientalists is that the Qur'an is deeply coloured by the narratives of the Old and New Testaments. This is also untrue. The Prophet of Islam was unlettered and he had no access to Biblical narratives. Where Biblical stories occur in the Qur'an, they are far from being true copies of these narratives. The Qur'an has omitted much of the Biblical material and added contents of its own. In many places the Qur'an gives a much more correct picture of the Prophets of the Old Testament and removes the

stigma which was attached to their character in the Biblical narratives. For example, the Old Testament says that the Prophet Lot cohabited with his daughters.<sup>6</sup> But there is no mention of this in the Qur'ān. On the other hand, the Qur'ān says :

وَأَذْخَلْنَاهُ فِي رَحْمَتِنَا إِنَّهُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

[And We brought him unto Our mercy. Lo ! he was of the righteous.]<sup>7</sup>

The fact is that the Qur'ān rejects as much of the Old and New Testaments as it accepts. It does not accept the New Testament version that Jesus was crucified and was resurrected.

وَقَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا قَاتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ  
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَاتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُهِدُوا  
أَنَّهُمْ دَفَعُوا إِلَيْهِ لَفْحَنِ شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ

6. *The Bible*, Genesis, xix, 31-38.

7. *The Qur'ān*, xxi. 75. Translation M. Pickthall.

مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعُ الظَّنِّ وَمَا  
قَاتَلُوكُمْ يَقِيْنًا لَكُمْ رَفِيعُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَلِيُّ وَ  
الْعَزِيزُ

[And because of their saying : We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger—they slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them ; and lo ! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof ; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture ; they slew him not for certain but Allah took him up unto Himself.]<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, it rejects the doctrine of Trinity :

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ سُو  
مَا مِنْ إِلَهٌ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ

[They surely disbelieve who say : Lo ! Allah is the third of the three ; when there is no God save one God.]<sup>9</sup>

The Qur'ānic view of morality also does not fit in with the New Testament view of morality in all respects. It is true that the

8. Ibid., iv. 157-58.

9. Ibid., v. 73.

Qur'ān relates the stories of the Old Testament Prophets. But this is not a piece of historical narration. The motives with which these stories are related by the Qur'ān are completely different. The object of the Qur'ān is not to depict the history of the Israelites but to teach moral lessons to the disbelievers of Mecca.

It is an agreed thesis of all the Orientalists that the Qur'ān is not the word of God but that Muḥammad himself (peace be on him) was its author. This thesis is untenable, because the language and style of the Qur'ān is completely different from that of the *Hadīth*. If the Prophet had been the author of both, there would have been many similarities between the two. But *Hadīth* is couched in a language which is peculiarly its own and bears no similarity to that of the Qur'ān. In spite of its eloquence, the *Hadīth* does not create in the hearts of men the same emotion of exaltation which is created by the Qur'ān. Moreover, the Qur'ān

challenges its opponents to produce a book like itself.

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَبِّ يَسِّرَنَا عَلَى عِينِنَا<sup>١٠</sup>  
فَأُتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّنْ مِّثْلِهِ

[And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto Our slave (Muhammad), then produce a *surah* of the like thereof.)] <sup>10</sup>

The same challenge is not repeated by the Prophet in respect of his Traditions.

It is these and many other notions which need to be rectified. Unfortunately, they have, over the centuries, become so much an accepted part of the Western people's idea of Islam that only sincere efforts spread over a long period, and particularly covering impressionable sections like students and youthful researchers, can help to remove these age-old misconceptions. I feel that the spirit which motivated the organ-

10. Ibid., ii 23. The challenge is repeated in other places too, e.g. x. 38; xi. 13.

isers of the World of Islam Festival can be a good beginning in this behalf.

The Festival should also serve to remind the people of the West that for a long time the Muslims led the world in science, technology and all the arts and techniques of culture. While Europe was still living in the dark ages, a brilliant civilisation flourished in Muslim Spain. The name of Ziryab is world famous for his many inventions which refined the art of living. The libraries of Spain were so amply stocked with books that their catalogues alone ran into many volumes. The street-lighting system in Cordova and Granada was so perfect that it excited the envy of all Europe. Not only in Spain but in Baghdad also a civilisation of a high order flourished. The Muslim zest for knowledge reached amazing proportions. It is said that one of the traditionists, Sulaymān b. Ḥarb (d. 224 H.) counted forty thousand persons, including the then Caliph, among his disciples. It is

related that when Imām Muḥammad Shāybānī (d. 189 H.) taught *Muwattā'* at Kūfah, the people thronged in such large numbers that traffic came to a standstill. Great scientists like al-Khwārizmī, al-Bīrūnī and Ibn Haytham advanced the frontiers of scientific knowledge to an extent never before reached in the history of mankind, and handed down to Europe a rich heritage of scientific knowledge. The scientific revolution in Europe which began with Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and Kepler could not have come into being without the indefatigable labours of the Muslim scientists of the Middle Ages. Similarly, the philosophers of Islam like Ḇindī, Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd not only preserved the philosophy of the Greeks but improved upon it. It is said that David Hume's theory of Causation, which denied the necessary nexus between cause and effect, was an echo of Ghazālī's views in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*.

European literature in the Middle Ages was deeply influenced by Arabic literature. *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and *Alf wa Laylā* were translated into many European languages. Some European critics are of opinion that if there were no *Alf wa Laylā*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* would not have existed. Even during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the literature of Europe was enriched by many translations from Arabic. For example, Ibn Battūtāh's travels were translated by Apetz in 1819, Ibn Khallikān's *Wafayāt al-A'yān* was translated in 1842 by de Slane, Ibn Maskawayh's *Kitāb 'Adab al-Arab* was translated in 1898 by R. Basset, Fārābī's *Kitāb Fi Arā Ahl al-Madīnat al-Fāḍilah* was translated in 1900 by Dietrich and Ibn al-'Arabī's *Risālat al-Quds* was translated by Asin Palacios in 1939. Such examples can be multiplied, and they all establish the fact that Europe has been deeply influenced by the culture of Islam. The Reformation and

the Renaissance in Europe may also have been indirectly influenced by the teachings of Islam which made their impact on Europe through Spain, although evidence for this is hard to obtain. But the fact remains that contact with Islam awakened Europe from its long slumber.

I am sure that this influence of Islam on European culture and civilisation will be appropriately mirrored in the many exhibitions that form part of the Festival. Perhaps this will be helpful in removing from many European minds the image of Islam as a religion of barbarians and cutthroats. This is a prerequisite for any further understanding of Islam in the West.

Allow me also to say a few words about what we Muslims have taken from the West and how we should today look at the highly advanced but essentially materialistic culture of the Western world. Just as the West learned much from Islam, so we Muslims have been learning from the West dur-

ing the last two centuries. Unfortunately, a considerable section of Muslims has been unduly overawed by the ascendancy of the West and is intent on imitating it in mere superficialities and externals. Without looking into the deeper foundations of the Western civilisation, and without taking into consideration the spiritual character of the culture of Islam and its brilliant past, these people go in for the wholesale imitation of the West and are unable to differentiate between its vices and its virtues. The outer glitter of Western culture has dazzled their eyes and they have become forgetful of their own glorious traditions and spiritual values. They have taken to drinking and gambling and have been attracted by sex liberty prevalent in the West. Such habits have created a wide gulf between their mode of living and that of the masses who are deeply attached to the Islamic virtues of sobriety, chastity and sexual continence. Thus the influence of the West on

the Muslims has not been all to the good. We do not blame the West for this, because it is our own fault if we are unable to distinguish the bad from the good.

What we should acquire from the West is its science and technology, its dedication to the pursuit of knowledge, its tradition of hard work and its attachment to democratic values. Instead of imitating the superficialities of the West, we should try to delve deep into its spirit and the principles which underlie the outer framework of its civilisation. If we do this, we shall be reverting to some of the noble and excellent aspects of our own past culture which have permeated into the West.

However, the material progress of the West should be combined with the spiritual outlook of Islam and its moral values if the Muslim society is to follow the right direction and avert the dangers with which Western civilisation is faced today. Such a synthesis of the material and spiritual

aspects of life is inherent in the teachings of Islam.

What the world needs today is a society which has the material strength and prosperity derived from Western scientific knowledge, industrial progress and technological skill, but is, at the same time, rooted in the spiritual and moral values of Islam such as equality and brotherhood, freedom from racial and national prejudices, social justice, love of truth and toleration of religious and sectarian differences. If the world can achieve a synthesis of these two ingredients of a healthy and progressive society, it can rid itself of the dangers that threaten to wreck its stability and progress. But if these two ingredients are not synthesised, and each goes its own way, the consequences may wellnigh be fatal for the peace and progress of humanity.

I am grateful to you all for listening to me so patiently. Having come from a country which came into existence on the

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basis of the ideology of Islam, I considered it my duty to lay before you some of my thoughts on this important subject. I again thank the organisers of the World of Islam Festival for inviting me to participate in the Colloquium. On behalf of myself and the Government and the people of Pakistan, I wish them success in their endeavours to bring a true understanding of Islam to the people of the West.

Thank you.

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Maulana Kausar Niazi was born on 21 April 1934. At 42, he is among the youngest members of the Cabinet where, for the last five years, he has been Minister first for Information and Broadcasting, Auqaf and Hajj, and now for Religious Affairs, Auqaf and Hajj, Minority Affairs and Overseas Pakistanis. He speaks several languages, including Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English. His knowledge of Islamic theology is as unique as his acquaintance with the best in world literature, not necessarily religious. The practical thinker that emerges from his books uplifts the Maulana to the plane of one truly learned in the ways of Islam.

Maulana Niazi is essentially a man of the people, having risen from among them and serving them through the People's Government wisely stewarded by his leader, and that of the people, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Elected on Mr Bhutto's call in 1970 with an overwhelming majority, Maulana Niazi, then serving a term as a political prisoner, was later chosen to be a Cabinet Minister when Mr Bhutto became President. The Maulana's life is a story of vicissitudes, of fortitude in the face of misfortunes and of humanity towards his fellow beings. That most of it was spent in the company of the Common Man is not fortuitous. The Maulana would have liked it to be no different.

In this book the Maulana gives his views about how the West has, by and large, looked at Islam and how the misconceptions and misunderstandings generated by this attitude may be corrected.

"What the world needs today," says the learned Maulana, "is a society which has the material strength and prosperity derived from Western scientific knowledge, industrial progress and technological skill, but is, at the same time, rooted in the spiritual and moral values of Islam." He warns that "if these two ingredients are not synthesised and each goes its own way, the consequences may wellnigh be fatal for the peace and progress of humanity."

A study of the book will help promote understanding between East and West and will be instrumental in bringing them closer to each other.

Rs. 100